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ABSTRACT

The effect of Bronx Community College counseling program on the academic suspension rate of probationary students was investigated. The significance of the difference between the percentage of probationary students suspended at the end of the Fall 1977 semester and those suspended at the end of the Spring 1978 semester was computed. For comparison, the significance of difference between the percentage of non-probationary students who failed to meet college retention standards at the end of the Fall 1977 semester and the Spring 1978 semester was computed, as well as the significance of the difference between the percentage of students unable to meet retention standards at the end of the Fall 1976 semester and the Spring 1977 semester. Results indicate that the counseling program was successful in reducing the suspension rate of probationary students. (Author/HLM)

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The Bronx Community College Counseling Program for Probationary Students: A Final Evaluation

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The Bronx Community College Counseling Program for Probationary Students: A Final Evaluation

In the 1950's and early 1960's, a basic purpose of American higher education was to provide the nation with a cadre of leaders who would use their advanced training for invention, production, and the advancement of knowledge in order to raise the nation's standard of living. The need now is not so much for further invention and production as for better distribution systems, more broadly-based education, and more concern for individuals. Consequently, Cross suggested that the way to improve life for everyone is no longer to educate a few people for positions of leadership, but rather to educate the masses to their full humanity (1973, p. 88).

At present, a large group of people whom colleges used to dismiss as "not college material" are walking through the open doors of institutions of higher education. In fact, they constitute an ever increasing proportion of the college population. For one reason or another, these students have not been successful in school; they are supposedly not prepared to undertake college work.

The City University of New York (CUNY), through the establishment of special programs, has developed a strong commitment to offering a meaningful and enriching collegiate experience to educationally disadvantaged students.

In the mid-1960's, CUNY established two major programs for

educationally disadvantaged students, SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) and College Discovery. These programs offer supportive services, such as counseling, remedial instruction, and financial aid, to participating students.

In 1970, the University established its Open Admissions Program which guarantees every New York City resident who earns a high school diploma a place in one of its community or senior colleges.

In 1972, CUNY's Vice Chancellor for Budget and Planning, T. Edward Hollander, stated that the Open-Admissions program is the first realistic attempt to provide equal higher educational opportunity for high school graduates (p. 256). He indicated that the program is based on the premise that every high school graduate has a right to a reasonable chance for success in college and that the college's responsibility is to adopt its program to compensate for educational disabilities attributable to socioeconomic causes that limit the student's ability to compete (pp. 256-257). Consequently, he suggested that CUNY's Open Admissions Program should not be judged in terms of how many or what proportion of its students earn baccalaureates. Instead, the program should be judged in terms of who is now coming to college at CUNY and by CUNY's ability to prepare students for useful lives, recognizing that, for many, this goal will involve only one, two, or three years of college (p. 259).

After reviewing much of the data concerning CUNY's changing student population and its success as reflected in graduation,

retention, and credit generation, Trivett concluded that although open admissions has been a success in providing access to a sizeable group of previously underrepresented students, large numbers of these newcomers are not succeeding once admitted (1976, p. 5).

In terms of who is now coming to college at CUNY, Hollander's goal has been achieved. However, in 1976, CUNY's Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Timothy J. Healy, pointed out that as a result of the University's lenient retention standards, it's approaching the idea of tenured students. He stated (p. 173), "we have learned the lesson, and are correcting the balance on the side of severity".

In response to the situation which Trivett and Healy described, CUNY adopted a new set of student retention standards in the Fall of 1976 which not only include stiffer grade point average (GPA) requirements but also include rate of progress requirements (ROP). Tables 1 and 2 indicate the minimum cumulative GPA and semester ROP which must be earned at specified levels of credits or equated credits (remedial coursework) attempted.

At Bronx Community College (B.C.C.), the adoption of the new CUNY-wide retention standards resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students placed on probation or suspended. For example, at the end of the Fall, 1977 semester, 2,487 students out of a total enrollment of 8,845 (28%) failed to achieve a satisfactory cumulative GPA and were, therefore, placed on probation of suspended. In addition, 1,219 students (14%) who

TABLE 1

Retention Standards: All Students

Cumulative Number of Credits or Equated Credits Attempted	Minimum Semester[a] Rate of Progress	Minimum Cumulative GPA (Index)
Less than 12	No reclassification	No reclassification
12 - 23½	50%	1.50
24 - 35½	66%	1.75
36 - Upward	75%	2.00

[a]Only grades of A, B, C, and D are considered satisfactory.

TABLE 2

ROP Standards: Probationary Students

Cumulative Number of Credits or Equated Credits Attempted	Minimum Semester[a] Rate of Progress
Less than 12	No reclassification
12 - 23½	50%
24 - 35½	66%
36 - Upward	75%

[a]Only grades of A, B, C, and D are considered satisfactory.

achieved a satisfactory GPA were unable to meet the ROP standards but were not placed on probation or suspended since the CUNY Council of Presidents decided to, temporarily, suspend the ROP standards. Consequently, 3,706 students out of 8,845 (42%) failed to meet at least one of the new retention standards. In fact, 1,809 of them failed to meet both standards.

In order to reduce the high percentage of students who are suspended from B.C.C. after having been on probation, the College's Department of Student Development initiated a special counseling program for probationary students during the Spring of 1978. It is hoped that the program will also significantly lower the growing overall attrition rate at B.C.C. which is rapidly approaching the national attrition rate for community colleges as reported by Cope and Hannah (1975, p. 2). They indicated that the attrition rate for a freshman class stands at about 50% after one year of study. The Fall, 1976 freshman class at B.C.C., which was the first admitted under CUNY's new retention standards, lost 47% of its members within one year.

During the Spring of 1978, the 1,271 non-College Discovery students at B.C.C. who did not meet the University's GPA retention standards and, therefore, were on probation or were readmitted after having been suspended were required to attend one of many large group meetings, led by counselors, at which both retention standards were presented and discussed. The meetings were attended by 839 students (66%). After attending

one of the large group meetings, students were required to attend a small group meeting at a latter date. At these meetings, students were given the opportunity to explore, with a counselor, the various factors which contributed to their lack of academic success, such as, financial and personal problems, lack of knowledge concerning the College's regulations and resources, and the lack of clearly defined academic and career goals. All 245 probationary College Discovery students explored the same material on an individual basis with counselors to whom they were regularly assigned.

In order for the program to reach as many students as possible, the Department of Student Development conducted a workshop for the teaching members of the faculty at which the program was described. They were requested to call the program to the attention of their classes and to refer individual students to counselors so that the students would have the opportunity to explore their probationary problems.

This investigation was undertaken to determine if the special counseling program for probationary students, described above, could effect a significant decrease in the percentage of students at B.C.C. who are suspended for not meeting the University's retention standards.

Method

In order to determine the effect of the counseling program upon the academic suspension rate of probationary students, the significance of the difference between the percentage of

probationary students suspended at the end of the Fall, 1977 semester and the percentage suspended at the end of the Spring, 1978 semester was computed. For comparison, the significance of the difference between the percentage of non-probationary students who were unable to meet the University's GPA and/or ROP retention standards at the end of the Fall, 1977 semester and the percentage who were unable to meet them at the end of the Spring, 1978 semester was computed. In addition, the significance of the difference between the percentage of students who were unable to meet the retention standards at the end of the Fall, 1976 semester and the percentage who were unable to meet them at the end of the Spring, 1977 semester was also computed.

Results

It was reported in a preliminary evaluation (Donnangelo, 1978, p. 8) that 61% (N = 1160) of the 1903 students on probation for not meeting either the GPA or ROP retention standards during the Fall of 1977 were suspended at the end of the semester whereas 59% (N = 1325) of the 2243 students on probation during the Spring of 1978 were suspended at the end of the semester. The decrease of 2% is not significant at the .05 level of significance. However, as noted previously, the CUNY Council of Presidents decided to, temporarily, suspend the ROP standards. Consequently, included among the 1903 students reported as being on probation during the Fall of 1977 were 681 students who did not meet the ROP standards and, therefore,

could have but were not suspended. Likewise, included among the 2243 students reported as being on probation during the Spring of 1978 were 727 students who did not meet the ROP standards and, therefore, could have but were not suspended. On the otherhand, 77% (N = 942) of the 1222 students actually on probation during the Fall of 1977 for not meeting the GPA standards were suspended at the end of the semester whereas 72% (N = 1092) of the 1516 students actually on probation during the Spring of 1978 for not meeting the GPA standards were suspended at the end of the semester. The decrease of 5% is significant at the .01 level of significance. Furthermore, 32% (N = 218) of the 681 students who could have been on probation during the Fall of 1977 for not meeting the ROP standards the previous semester could have been suspended at the end of the semester. Similarly, 32% (N = 233) of the 727 students who could have been on probation during the Spring of 1978 for not meeting the ROP standards the previous semester could have been suspended at the end of the semester. In contrast, 33% (N = 2284) of the 6942 students not on probation, or subject to it, during the Fall of 1977 did not meet the University's GPA and/or ROP retention standards at the end of the semester whereas 38% (N = 2186) of the 5731 students not on probation, or subject to it, during the Spring of 1978 did not meet them. The increase of 5% is significant at the .01 level of significance. Finally, 43% (N = 4713) of the 10,916 students in attendance at B.C.C. during the Fall of 1976 were unable to meet the retention

standards whereas 46% (N = 4665) of the 10,090 students in attendance at B.C.C. during the Spring of 1977 were unable to meet them. The increase of 3% is significant at the .01 level of significance.

Discussion

In the preliminary evaluation, the investigator concluded (p. 9) that the Department of Student Development's counseling program for probationary students did not significantly reduce the percentage of probationary students at B.C.C. who are suspended for not meeting the University's retention standards. He further stated (p. 9) that it is important to note, however, that the suspension rate for probationary students declined somewhat, from one semester to the next, while the percentage of non-probationary students who could not meet the GPA and ROP retention standards, during the same time period, increased significantly. Due to the very large sizes of the populations involved in this investigation, it is not likely that significant differences in demographic characteristics existed among the populations. Therefore, a significant increase in the suspension rate among probationary students, from one semester to the next, could also have been expected. Consequently, on the basis of the results presented in the preliminary evaluation, he stated (p. 9) that it may be tentatively concluded that the Department's program was somewhat effective in that it apparently prevented the suspension rate among probationary students from rising significantly. It is now known, however, that the suspension

rate for students on probation for not meeting the GPA retention standards did, in fact, decrease significantly at the .01 level from one semester to the next. It is important to note, at this point, that only these students were directly involved in the program. Students who were"on probation"for not meeting the ROP retention standards were not required to participate in the program since the ROP retention standards had been, temporarily, suspended. Therefore, it may now be concluded that the program was successful in significantly reducing,from one semester to the next,the suspension rate of the primary subgroup served by the program. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that the percentage of students at B.C.C. who could not meet the retention standards also rose significantly from the Fall, 1976 semester to the Spring, 1977 semester. For two years in a row, the student body, as a whole, has tended to be less successful in the Spring semester than in the Fall semester. Yet, probationary students did not perform less successfully, as measured by the change in their suspension rates, during the Spring, 1978 semester. Furthermore, the percentage of students on probation for not meeting the GPA retention standards who were, nevertheless, able to achieve a semester GPA of 2.00 or higher increased from 35% in the Fall of 1977 to 37% in the Spring of 1978. The increase, however, was not significant at the .05 level.

Recommendations for Further Research

The academic performance of both probationary and

non-probationary students should be monitored for the next few semesters to determine if a trend develops in the percentages of students, in both groups, who are unable to meet the University's GPA and ROP retention standards. Furthermore, the demographic characteristics of both groups should be examined to determine if any significant differences exist.

In addition to continuing its efforts on behalf of probationary students, the Department of Student Development at B.C.C. ought to increase its efforts to prevent students from being placed on probation in the first place. A multiple regression analysis ought to be performed in order to identify those variables which are significantly related to academic success at the College. Variables of particular significance might well be the students' age, sex, ethnicity, financial aid, high school GPA, curriculum, and credit weights attempted each term. A regression equation could then be used to identify those newly admitted students for whom the likelihood of probation and eventual suspension is high. Special programs should be developed to meet the needs of these students.

The City University of New York has made one of the strongest commitments of any institution of higher education in this country to offering a meaningful and enriching collegiate experience to educationally disadvantaged groups. The goal of the University, as expressed by Hollander, should not be abandoned. Hopefully, it will be enhanced by efforts made in behalf of probationary students.

Copies of the instructional materials developed for this program may be obtained from the author.

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